

Shamanic Midwifery – Every Mother a Midwife

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Abstract: The author's thesis is that for a sustainable future, babies need to be born gently at home, with every mother being a midwife herself and optimally attended only by her lover, the baby's father. This paper demonstrates how to enhance the inner knowing of the mother to give spontaneous birth. The author, as shamanic midwife, journeys to the source of intuition and midwifes the mother to heal herself. Pre- and perinatal psychology is revisioned to place imagination and soul-making central to our work – and assist the reclamation of birth out of the hands of the experts, back to the family. The paper concludes with an invitation for perinatal professionals to contribute to a world wherein every baby is greeted earthside by the original lovers and is a living demonstration of the possible family.

Zusammenfassung: *Die schamanische Dimension der Geburtshilfe – jede Mutter ist eine Geburtshelferin.* Die These der Autorin ist, daß die Babys in einer freundlichen und bezogenen Weise zu Hause geboren werden sollten, wobei jede Mutter ihre eigene Geburtshelferin ist und nur von ihrem Geliebten, dem Vater des Babys, in umfassender Weise unterstützt wird. Dieser Artikel zeigt auf, wie man das innere Wissen der Mutter um ihre Kraft zu gebären stärken kann. Als schamanische Geburtshelferin betont die Autorin, daß es wichtig ist, Bezug zu den inneren Quellen der eigenen Intuition zu haben und die Mütter darin zu unterstützen, ihre Selbstheilungskräfte zu mobilisieren. Pränatale und Perinatale Psychologie wird dabei genutzt, Imagination und beseelende Beziehung ins Zentrum des Umgangs mit der Geburt zu rücken und die Geburt wieder zu einem Ereignis in der Familie werden zu lassen, bei dem die Experten im Hintergrund bleiben. Der Artikel schließt mit der Einladung an die Fachleute der Geburtshilfe und Perinatalmedizin, dazu beizutragen, daß jedes Baby bei seiner Geburt von liebenden Menschen begrüßt wird und die Geburt selbst eine Demonstration der Möglichkeiten der Familie ist.

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What is an authentic midwifery which truly serves the changing needs of humanity and our Earth? This question has laid central in my soul for over a generation of midwifery service to my community. I have articulated most thoroughly my approach to healing the Earth by healing birth through shamanic midwifery, an

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essential way *to be with the whole woman* becoming a mother, published in the *Pre and Peri Natal Psychology Journal* (Vol. 7, No. 1, Fall 1992) and entitled, “The Shamanic Dimensions of Childbirth”.

Through the years of teaching the inward skills of midwifery, as I call the conscious cultivation of intuition, I have noticed a tendency to *apply* the information secured through shamanic means in an *allopathic* manner. It is akin to herbalists who use plants to superficially get rid of symptoms, the allopathic way, rather than apply herbalism in a holistic manner.

The purpose of this paper is to give an example of shamanic midwifery – how I tap into the mysterious undercurrents of presenting symptoms, and empower the mother to heal herself by noticing the relation between events in her life. Below you will find the most recent case where shamanic midwifery assisted a woman in remembering her purpose and aligning all her bodies with a full expression of her truth.

“The bleeding won’t stop”. The voice on the phone is very frightened for this is her first pregnancy, long waited for and achieved at the age of 39 years. On a previous phone call, I had shared with her an herbal recipe¹ which has had generations of provings as a remedy for threatened miscarriage. The herbal formula will not keep a defected fetus intact yet will stop miscarriage if the mother has trouble holding the baby.

The mother had also taken my earlier suggestion to heart that she communicate imaginatively with her baby. I told her that I would do the same. She volunteered that the baby is strong and in good health – her baby wants to fully incarnate. When I heard this, I was prompted to share with her what had come to me in meditation about this condition of bleeding, and what her baby had told me.

In that quietest of places within my soul, I journeyed to see about the worried mother and her unborn baby. I asked, “How does the bleeding serve?” The response I heard was that the mother was deeply wounded and this was her way of expressing her pain. Then I recalled something she had said in an earlier visit to me – that when the baby’s father had returned from his vacation in Europe, he had told her something she found hard to accept.

The scene rolled before my mind’s eye – the baby’s father had sex with another woman. I preface my statement to the bleeding mother this way – “I had a fantasy about what this may be about, and it could be totally off the wall, yet here it is”. I then told her my vision of her mate’s adultery. She began to weep – and we then got to work.

My meditation had seen correctly – it was true. She told me that her response to her mate’s infidelity was to declare that she wouldn’t have sex with him in order to protect the baby. Also, if he had any question about the other woman, now was the time to go back to Europe to check it out. I asked her what her baby wants and she got very soft and replied, “My baby wants both mommy and daddy”. This is what her baby had told me in my journey, too. I then asked, how can this happen? “By healing the wound” was her answer. We then explored if she had ever had a similar experience, i.e., if her response now reminded her of an earlier time.

In her first marriage, adultery was the issue which separated the original lovers. Her husband at that time wouldn’t stop his affairs. She begged him for years. The bleeding mother says leaving him was the most empowering act of her life. The

tendency would be to leave this relationship as a statement of personal power. Yet would this really serve her baby?

When I inquired as to how she coped with the pain of adultery for years, she said that she “held it in and ended up with an ovarian cyst on my right ovary”. The medical response was an ovariectomy. When the symptom returned (for she was still married to an adulterer and holding in her pain), this time on her left ovary, she instead learned about so-called alternative medicine² and with herbs, etc. healed herself.

With this present situation, she again held in her pain. She wasn’t speaking to her mate when she called me. What was the bleeding saying now? We explored the many messages together – I mainly listening and asking questions here and there to facilitate a deeper hearing. I read her a poem by Franz Kafka when she asked what to do now;

You don’t need to leave your room.
 Remain sitting at your table and listen.
 Don’t even listen, simply wait.
 Be still and solitary.
 The world will offer itself to you.
 To be unmasked, it has no choice,
 It will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

By the time we came close to concluding our visit, she asked if she should talk to him? I responded by telling her it’s not so important what I think as what she thinks — so I ask her, “do you want to dialog?” She did – and the next phone call I receive, she had talked it through with her mate, was practicing forgiveness, and the bleeding had stopped.

Forgiveness here is essential to a full healing. When she was able to communicate her pain to her mate, he was free to respond authentically. He apologized and declared his commitment and full fidelity henceforth. Though deeply wounded, the mother says she trusts her faith will return and she will be able to fully forgive. This interrupts the pattern in her first marriage, and before that, from childhood – the pattern of being victimized. By realizing that the state of grace called forgiveness, is actually a process, a journey, we access the paradigm for giving birth. When mothers know we are here *for giving*, we can more gracefully *give* birth. Conversely, if we are here primarily *for getting*, then as mothers we forget our purpose.³

Birth is a natural expression of sexuality. As midwife, I am sensitive to the sexual current of the family. When a symptom arises, I see it as a messenger of the soul. In pregnancy, the soul has an opportunity like no other – taking any symptom and de-souling it by assigning a pure physical cause misses the opportunity. Almost always, distress signals in gestation have a sexual message. Listened to, heeded, these messages clear the way to spontaneous, unassisted birth, or *freebirth* as I call it.

Having read great literature – the best written preparation, by the way, for soulful midwifery and motherhood available – I am alert for the stories the symptoms tell. A symptom in pregnancy can be etiologically interpreted, that is sourced to primal cause, as well as imaginally seen through for its message. The messages

together tell a story – fairy tales, myths and legends find expression through our so-called physical symptoms. With the idea of symptom as story, I can allow my imagination full exploration.

Albert Einstein said that “Imagination is more important than knowledge”. The essence of shamanism, the earliest form of healing on Earth, is psychological, *imaginal*. The subtle body, or the body ensouled, is related to in a holy way. This is the model as healer, that I most identify with in my midwifery practice – the shaman.

Lest you surmise that modesty is not my natural virtue, it was not my personal ambition to be a shamanic midwife. (Can you imagine, how many little girls aspire to be a shamanic midwife when they grow up?) Rather, my community made me one – my community asks me to attend births and also calls me shaman.

My most cherished ambitions actually lay elsewhere: My vision is that *every mother is a midwife* and my life is devoted to healing the Earth by healing birth as women chose to be real mothers.⁴ A real mother is defined here as a woman who chooses in freedom to be a mother, gives spontaneous birth and nurses and cares for her baby – for *years*. I have pondered Z. Budapest’s words for some time now – she said, “What this country doesn’t need is a new president, what this country needs is a mother”. I would add, not a reasonable facsimile of a mother – i.e., a woman who is coerced into motherhood, schedules her cesarean, bottle feeds her baby and hires a nanny. When there are more real mothers, I will be able to retire from this work, for every mother will be a midwife.

In essence, what I did with the real bleeding mother before me, was to midwife her own healing. This occurred by first, responding to her call, dispassionately. Yes, this is a soul-making time, threatened miscarriage, yet it is also a story, a drama which can be innertaining as well as entertaining. Next I invited her *to source*, on her own, imaginally, what the bleeding is about. Thus, she became her own midwife. I trust that if one creates a condition, one can also de-construct that condition, when it no longer serves the soul’s purpose. I trust that if one needs no hired experts in conceiving a baby, one needs no paid paranoid attending the birth.

A shamanic midwife makes conscious the psychological connections. She is the mediator between the worlds, where realities interpenetrate. As guardian of the gateway, I attend to what draws out the mother’s truth. This practice, of learning to ask the right question at the right time, is the *maiotic* way of education – drawing out the natural knowing. *Maiotic* comes from the Greek Maia, which means “midwife”. In Greek myth, Maia is the mother of Hermes, midwife/messenger to the Gods.⁵ A midwife can carry the message, but it is the mother who creates it. It is possible for a mother to communicate with her baby.⁶ Whenever a mother asks me, in capacity of midwife, to tell her how her baby is doing, or how far along in labor she is, I invite her to ask her baby for this information. There is a chemical dialog going on already between the mother and baby – to tune into the meaning of these messages is the opus, the grand work of soul-making in pregnancy, birth and beyond.

I practice midwifery shamanically by clearing the road to freebirth in the pregnancy or even before conception. Indeed, a conscious conception lays the groundwork for a birth free of medical intervention. Through my books, articles, tapes,

videos, workshops,⁷ etc. many families are freer to experience birth as their own unique expression of creation. Sometimes, I even get a check in the mail from someone who was inspired by my word medicine and kindly thought to pay me for being their midwife – though I haven't left my home. (Now that's a cost effective way to run a midwifery practice!)

Returning to the mother who stopped her bleeding, the last time we spoke she told me that she trusted me 100%. Music to any midwife's ears – yet, beneath these lyrics of trust, may lurk transference. It is vital that I return any projection of her own capabilities upon me, back to the mother. I mean, I have enough personal power to handle in my life of my own. What is even more important however, is that she trust *herself*. This will be our next work – the mother reclaiming her power to give birth unassisted. As a midwife, I have no technocratic medical skills, do not use vacuum extraction, forceps, or perform cesarean surgery, therefore the mother births the baby herself.

Indeed, at the end of this millenium, a mother who gives birth spontaneously in the technocracies of the world, is by far in the minority.⁸ A bit of shamanic magic, re-imagining birth is in order to reclaim birth out of the hands of the experts, back to the family. Every time we return the power to heal and give birth to the mother, we are changing the old stories.

One old story is women need help in their dangerous rites-of-passage – and in technocracies, this help is medicalized. The new emerging story reclaims women's sexuality in all our creative expressions – including birth. This is the time to get the State out of our bedrooms. Every midwife at the turn of this century has the opportunity to be a change agent for evolution and co-create a freer world.

We can come home to that place of magic, where all things are possible, through shamanic midwifery. This place is free from MANipulation for it brings birth back home to the mother in all its fullness. What will be the consequences if the ways of the shaman, the *healer* was the prevailing myth which claimed midwifery? Imagine a world where every baby is a wanted baby – where mothers remember birth as a spiritual as well as natural rite-of-passage and, in ecstatic trust, give birth as a blessed celebration of Life. Indeed, imagine what you will, for this is what it will be. In this paper, I have invited you to include the vision of freebirth in however you are called to serve families in transition. Above all else, remember this – when a mother births on her own, she often will declare, “Now I know I can do *anything*”. The Earth has yet to see what the world would look like if half of humanity was free, no longer victimized in the gender wars. Within this context, look at your own practice to see if each word and action contribute to the best world you imagine. For you, are right now creating the future.

Healing One Mother is Healing the Earth.

Notes

1. Published as a P.S. to my foreword for Susun Weed's book, *Wise Woman Herbal for the Childbearing Year*. Ash Tree Publishing, Woodstock N.Y. 1988
2. Herbal medicine is the traditional way of healing on this planet. The medical technocracy is a rather late invention and rightfully should be called the “alternative medicine” to the proven efficacy of herbal medicine

3. With thanks to my partner, Frederick Baker, for this articulation in one of our many morning symposia in the kitchen
4. Thanks to James Kimmel for his magnificent primer *Whatever Happened to Mother* by Sweet & Simple Publishing, Tucson AZ, 1994
5. See “Hermes: Logos of Psyche”, Masters Thesis in Psychology by Frederick Baker, Sonoma State University, CA, 1993. Also, a paper entitled *The Psychology of Birth* by Frederick Baker (\$4 ppd) from Freestone Innerprizes address below
6. See *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* by Tom Verny and *Babies Remember Birth* by David Chamberlain and the Journals of the Association for Pre and Peri Natal Psychology, Human Sciences Press, NY, N.Y.
7. Please send a S.A.S.E. for a listing of works in print to Freestone Innerprizes, PO Box 111, Junction, UT 84740, USA
8. See World Health Organization’s statistics for neonatal mortality and morbidity. The U.S. is the 22nd on their list, meaning that there are 21 other countries in the world safer for babies to be born than the U.S.